

# Newsweek

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## Donations Of Time

Charities are finding that nothing raises awareness—and money—like field trips.

BY SANA BUTLER

**W**hen philanthropist Jeffrey Brewer heard the founder of ApproTEC speak in San Francisco recently, he was intrigued by the nonprofit's high-tech efforts to fight poverty and create jobs in Africa. But he wanted to learn more before shelling out money, so he scheduled a meeting with the founder. "I wasn't sure it was as good as it sounded," says Brewer, who lives in New York. Six months later, he boarded a plane for Kenya—at ApproTEC's behest—to check out their programs in person. "It turned out to be better."

Forget slide shows or annual reports. Charitable organizations are finding that field visits are far more effective marketing tools for deep-pocket donors looking for new experiences. The invitation-only travel programs allow donors, who typically don't mind paying their own way, to see firsthand what their money can accomplish. Such field trips—whether to AIDS orphanages in China, famine-relief programs in Sudan or earthquake-proof building sites in Indonesia—almost always result in increased awareness and bigger checks. Some donors become more active in the aid organization—Brewer now chairs ApproTEC's board—or throw fund-raising parties. "Lifetime passionate supporters means first they fall in love with the people and places that they meet," says Sherry Villanueva, who started organizing trips two years ago as a board member of Direct Relief International, which supplies medical and financial aid to locally run health programs. "We're not



FUN FUND-RAISING: VOLUNTEERS CYCLED THROUGH SOUTHERN INDIA FOR TSUNAMI RELIEF

sitting around on a fancy deck somewhere with waiters in white gloves."

Indeed, donor trips tend to mix fun with the fund-raising. *Miracle Corners of the World*, which provides small-business training and housing for young adults in Tanzania, will host its first donor trip in August, with a safari in addition to the ribbon-cutting ceremony at its new housing project. Last month, the London-based International Childcare Trust cycled 300 kilometers in southern India to raise money for children orphaned by the tsunami. The Philanthropy Workshop, a program cosponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation that acts as a boot camp for new donors, recently sent 14 participants to Uganda for a week to look at innovative school reform for girls and sustainable farming—as well as some gorillas in the bush.

While some critics argue that charities should focus on honing their mission statements instead of organizing adventure trips, others say

only a field visit can change a donor's view of the world. "I had a lot of ideas of how to fix Africa before I went over—and all of them were wrong," says Brewer. "I felt very humbled." Roderic Mast, the founder of Conservation International's donor travel program, CI-Sojourns, which enables top supporters to investigate endangered ecosystems around the globe, says he owes the rise in million-dollar-plus contributions to the growing popularity of his nature trips, up from three in 2000 to 13 this year. On one recent trip, Mast recalls how he left a donor and his wife on a beach in Michoacan, Mexico, at night to watch a nesting sea turtle. At breakfast the next morning, they marveled over how the mother gently covered her eggs and then spread sand over a wide area to obscure their location. "The experience was so moving, he cried," says Mast, a marine biologist, of the donor. "No amount of direct mail is ever going to achieve that."